

**APPLICATION
FOR
UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT**

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TITLE: INVOICE ENTRY

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INVOICE ENTRY

TECHNICAL FIELD

5 This invention relates generally to business methods and apparatus for manually entering invoice data into a procurement or accounts payable database. More specifically the invention relates to detecting and correcting errors when such data is entered into a business process.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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10 Procurement of products and services by companies for use within the company or for use in the manufacture of products has been developed and automated to a high degree. The technologies of electronic commerce provide significant advantages when applied to procurement systems. Once a product or service is ordered, and shipped by a supplier, the supplier normally requests payment by sending an invoice to the company which made the purchase.

20 While many systems have been developed for sending and receiving invoices electronically, a significant number of suppliers and purchasers continue to send and receive hardcopy invoices. Although fax technology is often used, as well as e-mail and conventional postal or courier services, the net is that a hardcopy invoice or equivalent image must be manually entered into the purchaser's procurement or accounts payable system. Where a large number of invoices must be entered

manually, errors are inevitable. Accordingly, methods and apparatus for entering invoices while minimizing or eliminating errors are desired.

5 K. Yukihiro in Japanese patent 11134419 describes a bill correction device for updating information in a stored electronic bill, based on comparison between an input bill and the stored bill. A correction unit updates the stored bill. Checking work is significantly reduced by judging from the number of times of
10 correction whether the content of the two bills are the same.

T. Setsuo in Japanese patent 11306247 describes an accounting processing system which deals with errors on slips. By totalizing a result, a computer detects errors. The computer also produces correction data and a slip to be added for
15 elimination of the error.

In an article entitled "MS Invoice Technical Design and Deployment," there is described a web-based invoicing application enabling suppliers to electronically submit invoices directly into a company's SAP R/3 enterprise resource application.

20 P. Houghtaling in an article titled "IBM's Small Suppliers Reap Big Rewards," describes a web site to post customized business forms for use by suppliers. The suppliers send invoices electronically using the forms thereby eliminating manual data entry.

A document of the monitor application titled "monitor-The complete IT solution for Intermodal Operators," describes how manual checking is replaced by automatic invoice checking facilities using a job's dispatch plan. This insures invoices do not duplicate previous payment requests.

A document of the ELF eInvoice application discloses a system for automating the manual review of legal invoices.

Despite the above-described developments, there remains a need for reducing errors in systems which manually enter invoices. In accordance with the teachings of the present invention there is defined a new process for entering invoices while reducing the number of errors involved. It is believed that such a process would constitute a significant advancement in the art.

OBJECTS AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is therefore a principal object of the present invention to enhance the invoice entry art by providing a process for invoice entry with enhanced auditing capabilities.

It is another object to provide such a process wherein enhanced operational capabilities are possible.

These and other objects are attained in accordance with one embodiment of the invention wherein there is provided a method of invoice entry, comprising the steps of, entering data from an invoice, by a first person, into a first database having a status indicator associated with the data from the invoice, and setting the status indicator to entered, entering a subset of the data from the invoice, by a second person different from the first person, into the database, matching the subset of the data entered by the second person with the data entered by the first person and highlighting any unmatched entries, either re-entering the unmatched entries by the second person and changing the status indicator to audit passed, or setting the status indicator to audit failed, or setting the status indicator to audit passed if there are no unmatched entries, and either posting the entered invoice data by the first person, to a second database, if the status indicator is audit passed, or re-entering the unmatched entries by the first person, changing the status indicator to re-entered and thereafter proceeding to the matching step, or changing the status indicator, by the first person to cancel.

In accordance with another embodiment of the invention there is provided an invoice entry system, comprising, means for entering data from an invoice, by a first person, into a first database having a status indicator associated with the data from the invoice, and setting the status indicator to entered, means for entering a subset of the data from the invoice, by a second person different from the first person, into the database, means for matching the subset of the data entered by the second person with said data entered by the first person and highlighting any

unmatched entries, means for either re-entering the unmatched
entries by the second person and changing the status indicator to
audit passed, or setting the status indicator to audit failed, or
setting the status indicator to audit passed if there are no
5 unmatched entries, and means for either posting the entered
invoice data by the first person, to a second database, if the
status indicator is audit passed, or re-entering the unmatched
entries by the first person, changing the status indicator to
re-entered and thereafter proceeding to the matching step, or
10 changing the status indicator, by the first person to cancel.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

The Figure is a flowchart showing an embodiment of the
present invention.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

For a better understanding of the present invention,
together with other and further objects, advantages, and
capabilities thereof, reference is made to the following
disclosure and appended claims in connection with the above
described drawing.

In the Figure there is shown a flowchart 10 of an invoice entry method in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. Starting at step 12 a first person who is a natural human person in contrast to a robot or computer program or other artificial intelligent being, enters data from an invoice into a first database (not shown). The invoice may be received from a supplier of a product or service who desires payment for the good or service delivered. The invoice may be a hardcopy document or it may be a scanned image of a hardcopy document which can be displayed on a computer monitor or other type for display for viewing such an image. The invoice may also be a softcopy of a document such as a word processor file which can be printed as a hardcopy document or viewed on a computer monitor using word processor software. The first person reads data from the invoice and enters the data into a first database. Entry may be done after reading the data using a keyboard attached to a computer processor having access to the first database. Other entry devices known in the art may also be used such as but not limited to pointing devices or touch sensitive devices. Any number of data items may be entered from the invoice. Depending on the type of database, the data items may be entered into fields. For example, fields may have specific meaning or identifications such as document number, invoice number, invoice date, purchase order number, baseline date, amount, terms, or vendor number.

The database may be any type of database such as but not limited to a spreadsheet database, a relational database, a sequential database, or a hierarchical database. The database has a status indicator associated with the data from the invoice.

The status indicator may be any type of indicator including a separate field. The status indicator can be set to various indications of status such as "entered", "audit passed", "audit failed", "re-entered", or "cancel". For each status indication an age e.g. days may be specified. If an age is specified, then any invoice with that particular status indication will be deleted if the invoice has been at the same status indication for the specified number of days or longer. The status indicator may also include a push button which can be activated to specify a reason for the status. For example activating the push button may display a list of reasons from which one of the reasons may be selected. The push button may also activate a reason field where a reason may be entered.

In step 14 a second person also a natural human person, different from the first person audits the invoice entered in step 12. The second person enters a subset of the data from the invoice into the database using any of the techniques and apparatus described above. The second person may also enter a user identification for providing an audit trail of who performed the audit. The audit may include other business controls for auditing business data which are known in the art.

In step 16, the subset of data entered by the second person is matched with the data entered by the first person. Any unmatched entries are highlighted. Examples of highlighting include display of the unmatched entries on a computer screen in a different color e.g. red, reverse video, flashing, sound, or other methods of indicating a difference or calling attention to an unmatched entry. All unmatched entries may be grouped together into a failed work queue and sent to the first person. It is also possible that the first person has inadvertently entered data from an invoice more than once. Matching step 16 can detect the presence of multiple copies of such data and highlight the multiple entries as unmatched. If there are no unmatched entries the status indicator is set to audit passed and the invoice data is posted by the first person to a second database in step 18. The audit passed invoice may be sent to a pass work queue and sent to the first person prior to posting to the second database. The second database may be any type of database such as described above. It may also be a database which is part of a procurement application such as the currently available SAP™ procurement application. (SAP is a trademark of SAP AG, Waldorf, Germany)

In step 20 the second person determines whether the unmatched entry can be changed and if so, re-enters the unmatched entry in step 22 and changes the status indicator to audit passed, after which the invoice entry method returns to step 14.

5 For example, this re-entry would be appropriate for the case where the second person (the auditor) determines that the auditor had made an incorrect entry. If the second person can not change the entry, then the status indicator is set to audit failed in step 24 and the invoice is returned to the first person. A
10 reason may be specified for the failure as described above.

The first person then either cancels the invoice in step 24 and changes the status indicator to cancel or else the first person re-enters the unmatched entries in step 12 and changes the status indicator to re-entered. The invoice will then proceed
5 to step 14 for auditing as explained above. A canceled invoice may be returned to the supplier.

In another embodiment of the present invention, a system for invoice entry includes means for entering data and a subset of the data into a database. Such means may be a computer processor
20 running a database application. The processor may also have various entry devices such as keyboard, pointing device, touch screen or other entry device. The database application may be a unique database application such as a spreadsheet application or relational database application. It may also be an application
25 having other functions which includes a database such as a procurement application having a database.

The system for invoice entry also includes means for matching the subset of data with the data entered by the first person and highlighting any unmatched entries. Such means may be software included in the database application or may comprise a separate application running on the processor running the database application or running on another processor.

The system for invoice entry also includes means for posting entered data to a second database. Such means include any software application capable of moving or copying data from one database to another under control of the first person.

The present invention may also be embodied as a computer program product for instructing a processor to enter invoices. The computer program product includes a computer readable medium such as a CD Rom disk, a floppy disk, zip disk, or other medium known in the art for storing software. Recorded on the medium are program instruction means for providing steps as described above.

While there have been shown and described what are at present considered the preferred embodiments of the invention, it will be obvious to those skilled in the art that various changes and modifications may be made therein without departing from the scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.